

VZCZCXRO1575
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHLG #0316/01 1561226
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 051226Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0545
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0368

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000316

CDC ALANTA
MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION WASHINGTON DC

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR AF WATCHER PETER LORD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [TBIO](#) [AEMR](#) [CASC](#) [KSAF](#) [KPAO](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: MALAWI SWINE FLU RESPONSE: GOOD PLANNING BUT STILL
VULNERABLE

¶1. Summary: While experience with SARS and preparations for Avian Influenza (AI) have benefited Malawi by raising awareness and facilitating relatively advanced planning, the GOM would face serious challenges in managing an actual H1N1 swine flu outbreak. Limited human capacity and scarce financial resources present the greatest constraints. End summary.

Good Planning Puts Malawi Ahead of the Curve

¶2. Soon after the H1N1 swine flu outbreak in Mexico, Malawi's health services began developing a national response. Malawi had experience in 2003 in mobilizing surveillance in response to the SARS outbreak and has been able to apply some of that experience in developing a pandemic response. Work since 2005 on AI has also made national health officials aware of the implications of pandemic influenza, provided familiarity with WHO phases, and has led to the development of a basic planning / response framework and establishment of a standing committee.

¶3. On May 5, the GOM convened a meeting of health sector stakeholders from government and the donor community to work on a swine flu action plan. With a draft plan and an associated budget in hand, officials held a follow-up meeting on May 15 and initiated individual task groups covering Surveillance, Communications, Diagnosis and Treatment.

** Surveillance planning addressed airport and land border crossings, including an assessment of quarantine facilities at the airports and development of standard criteria and case definitions to support immigration controls.

** Communications work included development of a strategy for disseminating information in both English and Chichewa through print and broadcast media. The Communications task force has put out press releases and fact sheets for health workers.

** Addressing diagnosis, the GOM activated the national reference laboratory in Lilongwe for proper sample collection, and it plans to activate a previously used courier service to transport samples. The government also intends to secure the services of two WHO-approved collaborating laboratories in Kenya and South Africa to receive and test samples for H1N1. The two laboratories have since obtained primers from CDC-Atlanta and are now ready to test samples.

** Hospital sites in Blantyre, Mzuzu and Lilongwe are designated for managing H1N1 cases, including forward deployment of sample materials and Tamiflu. Standard operating procedures, based on AI procedures, have been

developed with the assistance of CDC and WHO. WHO has brought in 19,096 doses of Tamiflu and the GOM has completed an expedited registry of the drug, making it legally available for use in Malawi.

Capacity Limitations Expose Continuing Vulnerability

¶4. Despite commendable planning, Malawi's overall preparedness for a major swine flu outbreak remains suspect. Lack of resources, both in human capacity and funding, presents the greatest challenge. Although planning has been good for surveillance and management at the initial stages, there is no national response plan should Malawi be subject to a full blown pandemic. The inability of the health sector to cope adequately with a cholera outbreak earlier this year also raises concern. Finally, a high incidence of HIV/AIDS, poor nutrition, and inadequate health coverage, particularly in rural areas are examples of factors that could make a pandemic flu outbreak in Malawi devastating.

¶5. Inadequate numbers of Personal Protection Equipment is of particular concern. The MOH has made a specific request to the USG for 1,000 PPEs.

Comment

¶6. Malawi's response to the outbreak of swine flu in Mexico was gratifyingly swift. It's development of communication materials, plans for surveillance, testing and treatment, and structures to channel assistance represent a significant

LILONGWE 00000316 002 OF 002

accomplishment. Nevertheless, capacity constraints continue to make Malawi vulnerable to a serious outbreak in the country or the region. Malawi must make continued efforts to strengthen its health care system at all levels before it can be fully prepared to face an outbreak.
BODDE